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SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY

IN 1879 Pope Leo XIII issued an Encyclical entitled from its initial words, "Aeterni Patris." It is an extremely important document. There he points out that it is the proper function of the Roman Pontiff to see to it that the Catholic faith is kept free from error. And inasmuch as men's minds are often led astray by false philosophy, the highest shepherds of the Christian flock have always taken care to see that all human disciplines should be taught to the faithful in accord with the norm of the Catholic faith, especially so *philosophy* upon which depends to a great extent the correct interpretation of the other sciences. The present time, he continues, demands a new reminder and a renewed consideration of the matter of philosophical studies.

If one examines carefully two evils, public and private, of the present age, Pope Leo tells us, he will find that a fruitful cause is an erroneous philosophy concerning things human and divine, which has found its way into all ranks of society. And as man is by nature prone to follow in his conduct the guidance of reason, it follows that if his understanding is in error his will will follow suit. To be sure philosophy is not everything. It is not all-powerful for good any more than it is irresistible for evil. The help of God must be sought above all. Nevertheless human and rational means must not be neglected. And among these human aids is a true philosophy.

Philosophy if properly used paves the way for the true faith and prepares the mind of the pupil to receive the words of revelation. For many of the teachings of revelation were discovered also by the ancient philosophers by the sole aid of the reason, hence reason testifies to the truths of revelation. This is the symbolical meaning of the command that was given to the Israelites in Egypt on the eve of their departure from that land that they should borrow vessels of silver and of gold and raiments from the Egyptians. This symbolizes the use that should be

¹ *Philosophia Scholastica ad mentem Sancti Thomae*. R. P. SEB. UCCELLO S. S. S. Tomus I, Logica, Ontologia, Cosmologia. Tomus II, Psychologia, Theodicea, Ethica. Augustae Taurinorum MCMXXI. pp. xx, 411, 459.

made of philosophy for the benefit of the true faith. This is nothing new; the Fathers of the Church followed the practice.

More specifically philosophy demonstrates the existence of God. It also shows that God is wisdom, justice and truth. Philosophy must be cultivated diligently in order that by its help sacred theology may assume the character of a science. Philosophy lends clearness to some extent even to the mysteries of the faith which cannot be strictly demonstrated. It helps also in resisting the attacks on religion on the part of unbelievers. In order, however, to be able to accomplish all these things and be of service to religion, philosophy must be humble and confine itself to its proper sphere and in the manner of a handmaiden attend upon the revealed doctrines and confirm them by reason. All that has been said so far is confirmed by a study of the history of philosophy. The greatest of the ancient philosophers erred in their opinions because they had not the benefit of revealed religion. But the Fathers of the Church combined the philosophical method with Christian revelation to the great benefit of the latter. The same was done by the Doctors of the Middle Ages who are called Scholastics. And among them the greatest is Thomas Aquinas, who summed up in his inimitable writings all that had been done before. There is not a part of philosophy which he has not treated with acumen and solidity—the laws of ratiocination, God and the incorporeal substances, man and the other sensible things, human acts and their principles—all these things he discusses, with a fulness, order, conclusive force and perspicuity which cannot be equalled. Moreover, his arguments are based upon broad principles which carry within them the seed of an infinite number of truths to be opened in the course of time as opportunity offers by subsequent teachers with great benefit. His refutation of the errors of his predecessors can very readily be applied to the errors of the present and the future. This is the reason why in past times the most distinguished theologians and philosophers hung upon his words and regarded it almost a sin to depart from his teachings. Not merely his fellow members of the Dominican Order, but the Benedictines, the Carmelites, the Augustinians, the Jesuits and the other sacred orders followed St. Thomas. The Popes, too, lavished praise upon the doctrine of St. Thomas—Clement VI, Nicholas V, Benedict XIII, Pius V, Clement XII, Urban V, Innocent XII, Benedict XIV, Innocent VI. And what is more, Thomas is quoted as an authority on various things at the Oecumenical Councils, and the Fathers of the Tri-

dentine Council place Aquinas's *Summa* on the same plane with the codices of the divine Scriptures and the decrees of the greatest Pontiffs, as a source of truth. The opponents even of the Catholic doctrine sing the praises of the Angelic doctor.

Since the sixteenth century, however, a new order in philosophy has taken the place of Scholasticism. Everybody claims the freedom to philosophize without restraint. Many and various philosophies have arisen as a result, more than is right. The variety of opinions on the most important matters led to doubt and scepticism and thus easily to error. This contagion has spread among Catholics also who are led by the instinct of imitation and the allurements of novelty to the detriment of true science.

For all these reasons it is the desire of the Pope that efforts should be made by the Church to restore Aquinas to the place of honor which he formerly occupied and which is his due. This may be accomplished in the following way. Since the Christian faith is being attacked in our day in the name of a fallacious science, it is necessary that all young men and especially those who have hopes of serving the Church should be nurtured in the true doctrine of St. Thomas so that they may be armed to defend their religion and answer all questions. Those who, pretending to be guided by reason alone, have abandoned the Catholic Church and have become its opponents, can best be brought back, if at all, by the arguments of the Scholastic philosophy. The ills of society, civil and political, can best be cured if people can be made to lend an ear to the ideas of Thomas Aquinas concerning the true nature of liberty, the origin of authority, the force of laws, the authority of government, and so on. All human knowledge will be the beneficiary if we have a true philosophy that is generally cultivated. This does not mean that every statement of Thomas Aquinas shall be regarded as gospel truth even though it has been proved untrue by modern science. The motto should rather be "*vetera novis augere*," to add the new to the old, to adopt as much of the old as is compatible with what is indubitably true in the new.

In 1914, Pope Pius X, the successor of Leo, re-affirmed the advice of his predecessor.

The book under review is one of the very many evidences of the effect of the Papal Encyclical on the Catholic priesthood and scholarship. It would not serve any purpose to summarize here the comprehen-

sive contents of the two volumes before us. It would require a considerably lengthy review, and a technical one to boot. For the work of Uccello is no less than a presentation for school use of the entire philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. It goes even beyond the explicit teachings of St. Thomas, when it is necessary to take an attitude towards the various modern philosophies of Kant or Comte or Bergson. The development of the Thomistic philosophy in the hands of such men as Suarez is taken account of when it is necessary to expound in the spirit of Thomas Aquinas matters which the latter passed over in silence or very briefly. The author rejects Darwin's theory of evolution, and most of the modern social and political and legal theories. He is in complete accord with the ideas of the Papal Encyclical and the book is intended to be covered in a three-year course, thus giving the Catholic student a complete philosophy from the orthodox Catholic point of view.

Whatever one may think of the value of the philosophy presented in this book one must admire the courage of the Catholic Church. It has the courage of its convictions and goes about planfully and systematically in realizing the Catholic mind not merely by means of a catechism for the very young but by a systematic philosophy for the mature. Judaism has not attempted any such thing. The Synagogue and the Sunday School inculcate certain principles and feelings in the young. The schools and the seminaries impart a certain amount of information. But a systematic Jewish philosophy does not exist. We have no Thomas Aquinas. Maimonides does not occupy that place, and no one dreams of giving him such a place. All the scholarly work that has been done by Jews in connection with Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages has been in the nature of antiquarian research, and as such it has been received by the public. Many leading Jews seem to avoid deliberately a philosophic examination of the roots of Judaism and a relating of them to modern intellectual and social movements. The Jews have no Pope. But even a Pope is powerless if not supported by an intelligent and learned laity. The dearth below is even greater than that above.

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